



Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
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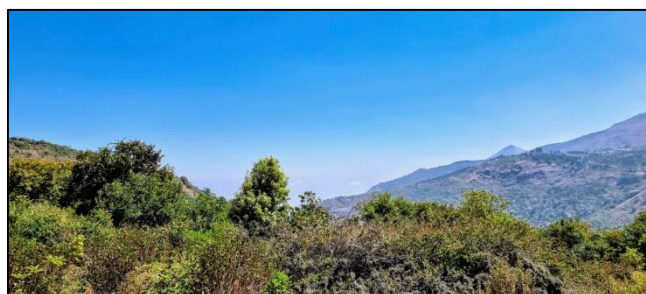
Trip Report: Masinagudi & Nilgiri Forest, Feb 25-27, 2022

Text & Photos: Aditya Rao



A view of the Nilgiri Hills from Masinagudi

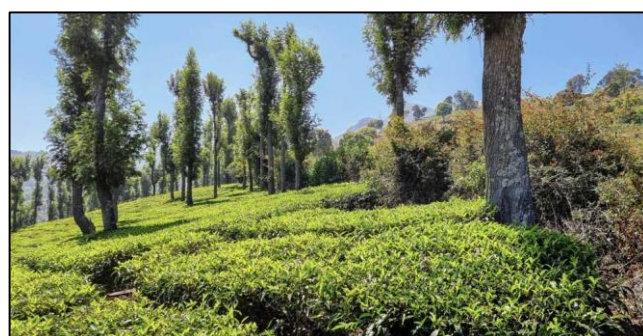
The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve lies within the Nilgiri mountains, which are part of the Western Ghats in southern India. Given its unique location, mountains and water sources, it creates a unique and diverse forest, including habitats ranging from scrub all the way up to moist montane forests. This mix makes this area an important birding hotspot due to its excellent habitat.



Shola forests of the Nilgiri Hills

My visit was just for two days, and yet I was able to spot close to 135+ birds, indicating the great birding diversity. Given the unique forest, especially around the hills reaching around 8000+ feet, it has many endemic species along with unique migrants coming all the way from the Himalayas to winter here. In fact, these forests are so unique that they are called **Sholas** and represent tropical montane forests found around these valleys, with patches of grasslands that makes it

distinctive and supports varied avifauna. The region has been severely impacted over the last few decades with the proliferation of tea estates, which do look pretty, but they must have come at the cost of destruction of a good amount of the shola forests.



A view of some tea estates at the Nilgiri Hills

Masinagudi is a town abutting the Mudumalai National Park and is a good place to halt, to explore both the foothills and the Nilgiris mountains. The tourist influx has been significantly cut down here of late, as several resorts that had sprung up (mostly illegally, on forest land inside the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve buffer zone) have been shut down. There are a lot of homestays with fairly basic facilities, some of which could be operating illegally, too. However, there are, of course, a few resorts being run legally, though with limited capacity.



Spot-bellied Eagle Owl



Black-and-Orange Flycatcher



Blue-bearded Bee-eater

My itinerary

Day 1: Arrived at Masinagudi from Mysuru around 5:00PM. Note that entry is not allowed after 6:00PM, so plan accordingly. I still managed about 30 minutes of birding around the homestay, which was in a forested area.

Day 2: Morning session – birded around the foothills and Masinagudi areas followed by a drive to the Ooty Botanical Gardens and back – with birding along the way, of course. This was followed by some more evening birding at Masinagudi foothills.

Day 3: Morning session – Started birding early at 5:30AM, to record any Nightjars. Birded in and around Masinagudi scrub forest areas for local birds and raptors. Left Masinagudi by 4:30PM.



Red-headed Vulture



White-rumped Vulture



Bonelli's Eagle



Indian Spotted Eagle (R) & House Crow (L)



Indian Vulture



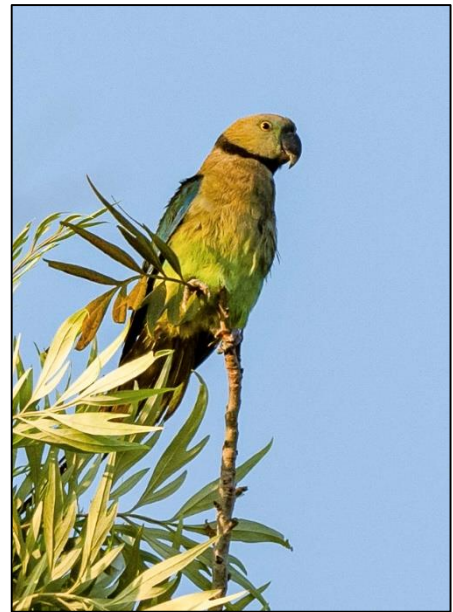
Brown Fish Owl

I travelled alone and stayed at a guesthouse, which provided a homely atmosphere and food during my trip. The area around the guesthouse is a great birding spot too but we need to be careful, as it is within the buffer zone, and I could see wild

elephants and bears move freely in the evenings. It is generally considered extremely unsafe to step out after dark in Masinagudi due to animal attacks. It is also good to have some locals for company as far as possible.



Steppe Eagle



Malabar Parakeet



Jungle Owlet

The full list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Blue-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctornis athertoni</i>	56	Vernal Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>
2	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	57	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
3	Thick-billed Warbler	<i>Arundinax aedon</i>	58	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
4	Oriental Scops Owl	<i>Otus sunia</i>	59	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
5	White-bellied Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus erythropygius</i>	60	Yellow-browed Bulbul	<i>Iole indica</i>
6	Taiga Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicilla</i>	61	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
7	Malabar Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros griseus</i>	62	Southern Hill Myna	<i>Gracula indica</i>
8	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus nanus</i>	63	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
9	Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>	64	Jungle Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>
10	Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Geokichla citrina</i>	65	Savanna Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus affinis</i>
11	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>	66	Indian Blackbird	<i>Turdus similimus</i>
12	Asian Fairy Bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	67	Painted Bush Quail	<i>Perdica erythrorhyncha</i>
13	Black-throated Munia	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>	68	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
14	Brown Wood Owl	<i>Strix leptogrammica</i>	69	Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>
15	Orange Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>	70	Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
16	Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	71	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
17	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>	72	Cinereous Tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>
18	Indian Blue Robin	<i>Larvivora brunnea</i>	73	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
19	Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>	74	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
20	Grey-fronted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron affinis</i>	75	Tickell's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>
21	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	76	Jungle Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
22	Spot-bellied Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo nipalensis</i>	77	Nilgiri Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias albicaudatus</i>
23	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>	78	Black-and-orange Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula nigrorufa</i>
24	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Lalage melanopectera</i>	79	Nilgiri Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>
25	Malabar Lark	<i>Galerida malabarica</i>	80	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
26	Brown-cheeked Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe poioicephala</i>	81	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
27	Nilgiri Thrush	<i>Zoothera neilgherriensis</i>	82	Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
28	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	83	Common Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococyx varius</i>
29	Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>	84	Indian Vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>
30	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	85	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>
31	Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>	86	Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
32	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	87	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
33	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	88	Greater Flameback	<i>Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus</i>
34	Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	89	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caeruleus</i>
35	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	90	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
36	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	91	Indian White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
37	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	92	Indian Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldii</i>
38	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	93	Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
39	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	94	Indian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta castanea</i>
40	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	95	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
41	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	96	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
42	Grey Francolin	<i>Ortygornis pondicerianus</i>	97	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
43	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	98	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
44	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	99	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
45	Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga clanga</i>	100	Oriental Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
46	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Leiopicus mahrattensis</i>	101	Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>
47	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	102	White-rumped Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>
48	Grey-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	103	Indian Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga hastata</i>
49	Grey Junglefowl	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>	104	Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>
50	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	105	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
51	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>	106	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
52	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	107	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
53	Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>	108	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
54	White-cheeked Barbet	<i>Psilopogon viridis</i>	109	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
55	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	110	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
111	Jerdon's Bushlark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>	125	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
112	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>	126	Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
113	Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>	127	Bay-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>
114	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	128	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
115	Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>	129	Booted Warbler	<i>Iduna caligata</i>
116	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>	130	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
117	Yellow-throated Sparrow	<i>Gymnoris xanthocollis</i>	131	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
118	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	132	Jungle Babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>
119	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	133	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Argya affinis</i>
120	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>	134	Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
121	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	135	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
122	Malabar Parakeet	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>	136	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
123	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	137	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
124	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>			

Some other photos taken during the trip:



Nilgiri Flycatcher male



Nilgiri Flycatcher female



Brown Wood Owl



Malabar Grey Hornbill



Indian Nuthatch



Puff-throated Babbler



Jerdon's Leafbird



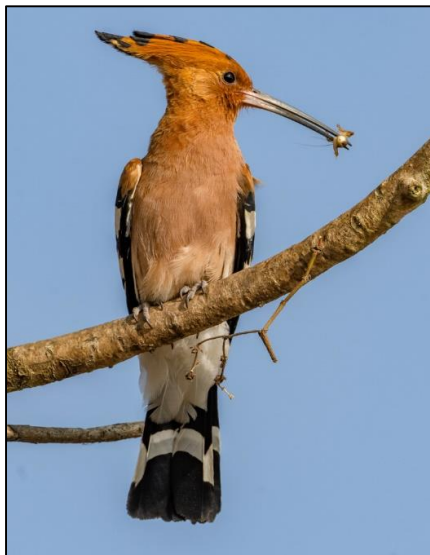
White-cheeked Barbet



Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher



Nilgiri Langur



Eurasian Hoopoe



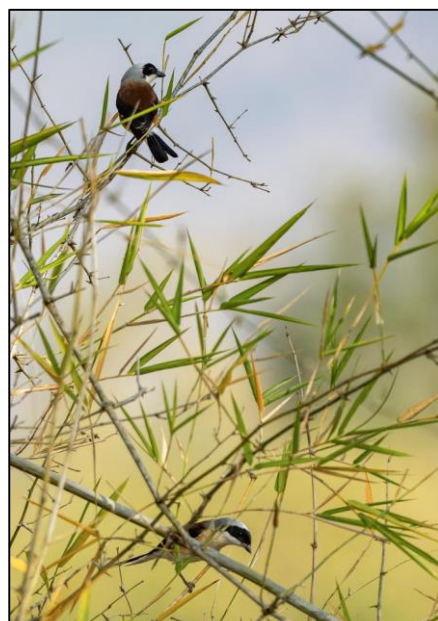
Spotted Owlet



Indian Peafowl



Chestnut-headed Bee-eater



Bay-backed Shrike



Indian Blackbird



Rat Snakes mating



Yellow-browed Bulbul



White-rumped Shama



Indian Blue Robin female



Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike



Asian Fairy Bluebird



Velvet-fronted Nuthatch



White-bellied Minivet



Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker



Black-headed Cuckooshrike female



Thick-billed Warbler



Black Eagle



Black-throated Munia



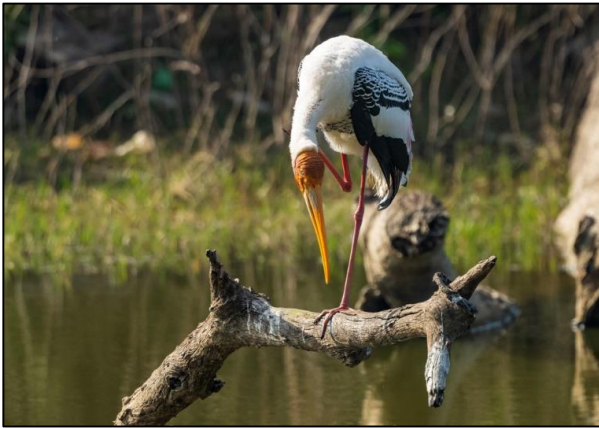
Brown-cheeked Fulvetta



Malabar Lark



Tickell's Leaf Warbler



Painted Stork



White-browed Fantail



Woolly-necked Stork



The author with the guides

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)



Common Snipe (Chennai, April 04, 2022)

Order: Charadriiformes

Family: Scolopacidae

Genus: *Gallinago*

Species: *G. gallinago*

Size: 25-27 cm

Description & distribution: The Common Snipe is a medium-sized, stocky member of the Scolopacidae family of sandpipers, curlews and snipes. It is the most common among all the snipes. The upperparts are a dark mottled brown with straw-yellow stripes running down its head, nape and back, while the underparts are white, with some brown markings on throat and flanks. The legs are short and greenish- or brownish-grey in colour. The neck is short, and the dark bill is straight, very long (5.5 to 7cm), and flexible, to enable probing in the mud for its prey. Wings are pointed. It has a dark stripe running through the eye to the sides of the head, with yellowish stripes above and below that serve to demarcate the eye-stripe. Irises are dark brown. The sexes are alike.

It is very similar to Wilson's Snipe of North America, which was until recently considered a sub-species of the Common Snipe. In India, it is also very similar to the Pintail Snipe and the Swinhoe's Snipe – telling them apart is very difficult unless a view of the spread tail is obtained. One sub-species of the Common Snipe, *G. g. faeroeensis*, seen in Iceland, Faroe Islands and thereabouts, is more richly toned on its head, upperparts and breast.

The nominate race is distributed almost throughout the Palearctic: it breeds in the regions east from Iceland across northern British Isles, northern Portugal, central France, northern Italy, Bulgaria and Ukraine, as well as European

Russia and Siberia. In Asia, it breeds in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkestan, the Middle-East, Afghanistan and east to Manchuria; it is also known to breed in north-western India (Kashmir and parts of the Himalayas). European populations winter in southern or western parts of Europe or in Africa, while Asian populations winter in tropical southern Asia, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Migration flights are usually at night.

Habitat & behaviour: The Common Snipe is usually seen singly or in small wisps – the collective noun for snipes – of about 5-20, although larger groups numbering several hundred have also been observed at times. It is usually seen in fair proximity of other shorebirds, in wet grassy areas near lakes and rivers, meadows, swamps, marshes, bogs, tundra, rice fields, estuaries and, occasionally, salt pans.

It forages in soft mud in small groups, starting early in the morning before it is even fully bright, and feeds mainly on invertebrates: terrestrial and aquatic insects and larvae, worms, crustaceans, molluscs, earthworms, snails and, sometimes, some plant matter. It uses its long bill, which is packed with nerve endings and highly sensitive, to probe for prey on or below the soft mud.

It is a very shy bird and tends to freeze and disappear into the grass when it feels threatened. Its cryptic plumage helps it camouflage and blend well with its habitat, often making it difficult to spot from a distance. When flushed, it tends to burst from its cover with an unnerving *scape scape* squawk, flying away in a twisted, zigzag course before dropping back to cover suddenly.

Breeding birds give a repeated hard, sharp *jick* call when excited, a *chip-per* call between males and females, and a harsher *chip* that the male makes when landing to court a female, or the female makes as a male winnows overhead.

Nesting: The Common Snipe breeds between April and June in most of its breeding range (May-June in India). It is monogamous and highly territorial, but do often show a high degree of promiscuity. The typical nest is usually a shallow depression in a dry spot, concealed in grasses or other vegetation, and lined with grass or plant matter. The male performs an elaborate aerial display during courtship, known as winnowing, flying high in circles and then making shallow

dives with a loud drumming sound, the mystery of which was unravelled by Philip Manson-Bahr, who worked out that the drumming sound was produced by the snipe holding out two tail feathers at ninety degrees to the direction of flight. The usual clutch consists of four olive-brown or olive-green eggs with a number of dark brown blotches or spots. Incubation is done by the female, but parental duties are shared by both parents.

Local name: The Common Snipe is known as 'Chaha' in Hindi, 'Muku puredi' in Telugu, 'Mor ullan', 'Ullan kuruvi' or 'Korra kuthi' in Tamil and 'Chuntan kata' in Malayalam.

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



**"Oh, not much, just painting the
babv's room."**

(From Facebook, March 23, 2022)

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For Private Circulation Only

Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani

Email: bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **Website:** www.deccanbirders.in. **E-group:** <http://groups.google.co.in/group/deccanbirders>. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)